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CUBA and AFTER

An Exclusive Interview with Dr. Haya de la Torre, Who Makes an Important Proposal



Haya de la Torre

Note:- This exclusive interview centres on the world crisis over Cuba, but also touches on other Latin American problems - and solutions. Dr. Victor Raul Haya de la Torre is the doyen of Latin American statesmen and the originator of most of the liberal and progressive ideas behind the social democratic movement in Latin America. His APRA Party won the last election in Peru, but was prevented from taking office by a military coup. - Ed.

QUESTION: What do you consider to be the lesson of the Cuban crisis, and of Khrushchev's agreement to dismantle the missile bases he had set up in Cuba?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: Well, it's fairly obvious that this has underlined the strength of the United States, and revealed the weakness of the Soviet Union. We see that for the Russians Cuba was a mere bargaining counter, a pawn, but one that was too far away. Castro has suffered a tremendous loss of prestige. You know how he was always boasting that he would fight. Now Mr. Khrushchev comes

along and says that the missile bases are his alone and are manned only by Russians; Castro is nothing and is not even consulted. But I want to point out that in Latin American eyes Castro first lost prestige greatly when he offered to exchange the prisoners for tractors - that was very offensive to Latin American sensibilities. You saw how the whole Organisation of American States rallied to support the U.S. blockade.

However, I have a serious proposal to make, a proposal for reducing the tension that still remains. I propose that there should be talks between Cuba and the United States, without Russia, so that this becomes a purely inter-American matter. Outstanding Latin American figures could act as mediators, men of the stature of Jose Figueras of Costa Rica, or Eduardo Santos of Columbia. There could be a commission set up by the Organisation of American States to mediate between Cuba and the United States. Perhaps they could arrange a referendum in Cuba to find out whether Castro has the support he claims. You know that Castro has never consulted the Latin

parliaments of the 21 states of North, Central and South America. As a matter of fact, I think that President Kennedy should have based his appeal on this treaty, not on the Monroe Doctrine.

QUESTION: What is the key clause of the Treaty?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: There is the preamble, which states its purpose as the preservation of peace in North, Central and South America, and the defence of human rights. There should be no war or aggression between any of the American States, and no extra-American aggression against any of the signatory states - neither armed, nor unarmed aggression, which covers subversion. Paragraph six stipulates that inter-American defence must comprise political, economic and collective military action, and the aggressor should be isolated.

QUESTION: Was that the basis of the Latin American states' support of President Kennedy's blockade?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: Yes. This clause had already been applied against the régime of the dictator Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, who was afterwards overthrown and killed in the Dominican uprising.

QUESTION: What has been the attraction of Castro in Latin America - what is it that has given rise to Castroite groups in a number of countries?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: There are a number of factors involved. There is something deeply sentimental and unrealistic in this attachment to Castro, also it has been a cloak for latent and not so latent anti-Americanism, which arises partly from American economic preponderance in the past, and American mistakes in the past: you know that the previous administration decorated Batista. There are also the people who want peace, at almost any price. There is Bertrand Russell, with whom I have just spent the weekend, down in Wales.

QUESTION: What has his reaction been?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: He tended to blame Kennedy more than Khrushchev, as you know from the messages he sent them. He was certain that the Soviet missile bases in Cuba were a myth, an American invention. I left him before Khrushchev confirmed the presence of the bases. I wonder what he thinks now! But to return to Latin America, you know that the U.S. is known in Latin America as the "Colossus of the North" - well, there was something gratifying in the David-and-Goliath situation of Cuba defying the U.S. But the "David" pose has turned into a bitter irony for Castro and his sympathisers, because he has turned out to be a mere Soviet puppet, a pawn. Khrushchev deals directly with Kennedy, totally ignoring Castro - and what is more, Khrushchev assures Kennedy that no Cuban is allowed anywhere near the missiles or their sites, that it is all in Russian hands - a foreign base if ever there was one! This has been tremendously humiliating for Castro, he is reduced to a mere nothing, a manipulated puppet who was always boasting of his independence. You can also imagine what a shock it is for Castro's sympathisers to find out that he has allowed nuclear missile bases to be set up on the soil of a Latin American nation - after all, they could be aimed in all sorts of directions!

QUESTION: So you think that Castro really did not know what he was letting himself in for in his flirtation with the Soviets?

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QUESTION: So you think that Castro really did not know what he was letting himself in for in his flirtation with the Soviets?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: I'm not so sure. I have some private information on that subject which is quite revealing. You know who 'Che' Guevara is, Castro's right-hand man, Minister of Industry now, but much more powerful. Guevara is an Argentinian, and this was told to me by an Argentinian ambassador who had had it from President Frondizi himself, when he was still President of Argentina. Guevara

said to Frondizi: "Please do what you can to keep us within the Inter-American system. As Russian influence grows in Cuba, and our situation deteriorates, we shall be in a very difficult position. I am sure that if there is any sort of accommodation or agreement in the cold war, we will be the victims. The really important point will be Berlin, and we would be sacrificed if a deal were made. In a hot war, we could be destroyed immediately. Our destiny is not very cheerful." That is why I think there is room for mediation between Cuba and the U.S., if Guevara and Castro have that much sense of self-preservation.

QUESTION: What is the alternative to Castro, or rather Castroism, for Latin America?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: Well, if you will allow me to say so, there is, and has been an alternative for thirty years now - I hope you don't mind my using the term that is used by a number of Latin American experts - the "Aprista" solution, from the APRA Party. This is our Latin American form of Social Democracy. You know Castro's slogan, "Bread and Freedom, Without Terror". Well, that is an Aprista slogan, taken from us, it is our idea. Castro, of course, has profaned it and besmirched it and made a mockery of it, for he has taken away the freedom and the bread, and has set up a terror. But the real "Aprista" parties are thriving. As you know, the Apra Party actually won the last election in Peru, and would be governing now if the military had not carried out a coup. Then there are the Liberals in Colombia; you have Betancourt in Venezuela, and Honduras. Though it is different in some ways, Mexico should also be included. And, of course, Bolivia, where a far-reaching revolution has been carried out - including a basic agrarian reform - with the help and encouragement of the U.S. - a real revolution!* If I have any objections to the Bolivian Revolution, it is that they have tried to impose a bit of doctrinaire European socialism they could have done without. For the point I want to make is that these "Aprista" movements are indigenous, home-grown and grass-roots movements.

QUESTION: Are these movements inter-connected?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: Oh yes, we maintain close links, especially in the trade union field, but in other spheres as well. As a matter of fact, I have just heard from Senhor Lacerda, Governor of Rio province in Brazil, who is now in London, that we are having a meeting very soon in Rio de Janeiro. But to return to this important point of the local and native roots of our movement. You can see it best in my own country, in Peru. The spirit of co-operation is bred in the very bone of our society, going back to the ancient Inca state. In the smallest village, life was organised co-operatively, and the head man would be elected democratically. Do you know that full male and female suffrage is an ancient custom, going back many centuries? When the Spanish conquerors came in the 16th century they tried to root out this co-operative spirit and organisation in order to organise the land on a feudal basis, but after three hundred years of colonial rule they could not really do it, and the old co-operative forms survived! We have been building on that basis - 98 per cent of the trade unions in Peru are Apra-affiliated, the peasants understand co-operation, and thrive on it. We also have industrial co-operatives, for example, our own sugar industry, which is co-operative from field to factory. The co-operative approach, combined with agrarian reform, and in a democratic parliamentary framework would

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* See FS/523, "Ten Years of the Bolivian Revolution" by Robert Alexander.

capitalism, for that is what the Soviet system is, and inevitably must be when there is no parliamentary government or elections. You know that Castro claims to be operating "direct democracy"; the crowds who mass in the square to hear his speeches and cheer him, constitute his "democratic" support. But these crowds have been growing thin of late, and what is more, they are mostly made up of children, adolescents, starting with thirteen-year-olds.

QUESTION: What are your plans?

HAYA DE LA TORRE: Well, we'll be preparing for the elections that have been promised this coming June.

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